



An independent review of the Greater Manchester Accommodation Service

Final Report

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ingeus

RW Russell Webster

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Thanks to Gunnar Ridderströmv for kind permission to use the header image in this post which was previously published on Unsplash.

Introduction

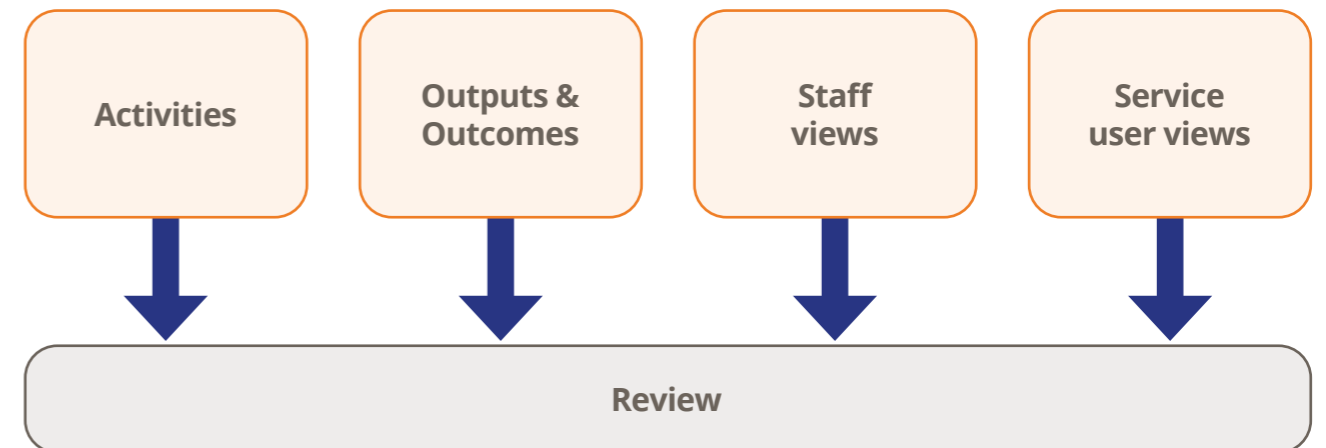
The Commission

Ingeus commissioned an external consultant, Russell Webster, to undertake an independent review of the Greater Manchester Integrated Rehabilitative Services (GMIRS) Accommodation Service which Ingeus has been delivering since November 2021. The Accommodation Service was commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and funded by His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS). The purpose of the service as described in the official GMCA documentation is to provide a service:

“Which enables and supports individuals on their journey from custody to the community preventing homelessness at each transition point and achieving long term sustainable accommodation outcomes.”

The review

The independent review includes four key components. These are: a description of the service and a review of its activities since its inception; an analysis of its outputs and outcomes; a consultation with the majority of staff at all levels including senior managers, team leaders and frontline staff (36.5 full-time equivalent individuals) and a small number of key stakeholders; and interviews with individuals who have used the project. The report sets out these four components in order before summarising the impact of the service and setting out considerations for its future operation.



Chapter 1: The service

Context

Ingeus has been delivering services to people in need in Greater Manchester since 2014. In the last twelve years, Ingeus has provided a wide range of services in the employability, wellbeing and youth sectors; supporting over 125,000 people and has succeeded in supporting over 50,000 Greater Manchester residents to start employment.

Service expectations

The GMIRS Accommodation was commissioned to support people on probation referred to the service to secure and/or maintain suitable accommodation. The service specification lists several expected activities, all of which are focused on supporting service users to secure and/or maintain appropriate accommodation. There is an acknowledgement that for many people this will initially be short term accommodation but there is an expectation that people will continue to be supported in their search for more permanent housing. It is accepted that this will not be possible for every service user but there is an expectation that individuals are helped to “make progress in obtaining accommodation”. The service provider is also expected to encourage service users to make use of other support services as part of a “whole systems approach”.

Timeline

Ingeus started delivering the Accommodation Service on 1 November 2021. The service was a replacement for a previous prison-based housing advice service delivered by Shelter which, itself, had originally been part of a Through-the-Gate support service for people leaving prison in the GM area.

Thirteen staff from the predecessor project moved over to join Ingeus (through the TUPE process) at its launch. The commissioners wished to re-model the service to have more advisors based in the community and this new design started operation in July 2022. This service expansion stimulated a huge influx of new referrals which generated extremely high caseloads for staff, causing the service to struggle to deliver its targets. The commissioners recognised that more staff were needed and provided increased funding in September 2023 in the recognition of this increased demand.

This had a very positive impact on performance through 2024 and 2025 (see next Chapter). However, staffing has once again been a challenge in 2026 with several staff moving on to new jobs, many stating that they had appreciated the support and training received from Ingeus and starting posts with other organisations at a higher grade.

While recruiting to these vacancies proved successful, long waiting times for HMPPS vetting, exacerbated by some rejections, presented further challenges. This put the service under considerable strain with staff having to cover for vacant posts despite having a full caseload themselves. At the time of writing (30 June 2026), seven new staff have been recruited and are expected to start work in August this year although the vetting process is ongoing for most of these individuals.

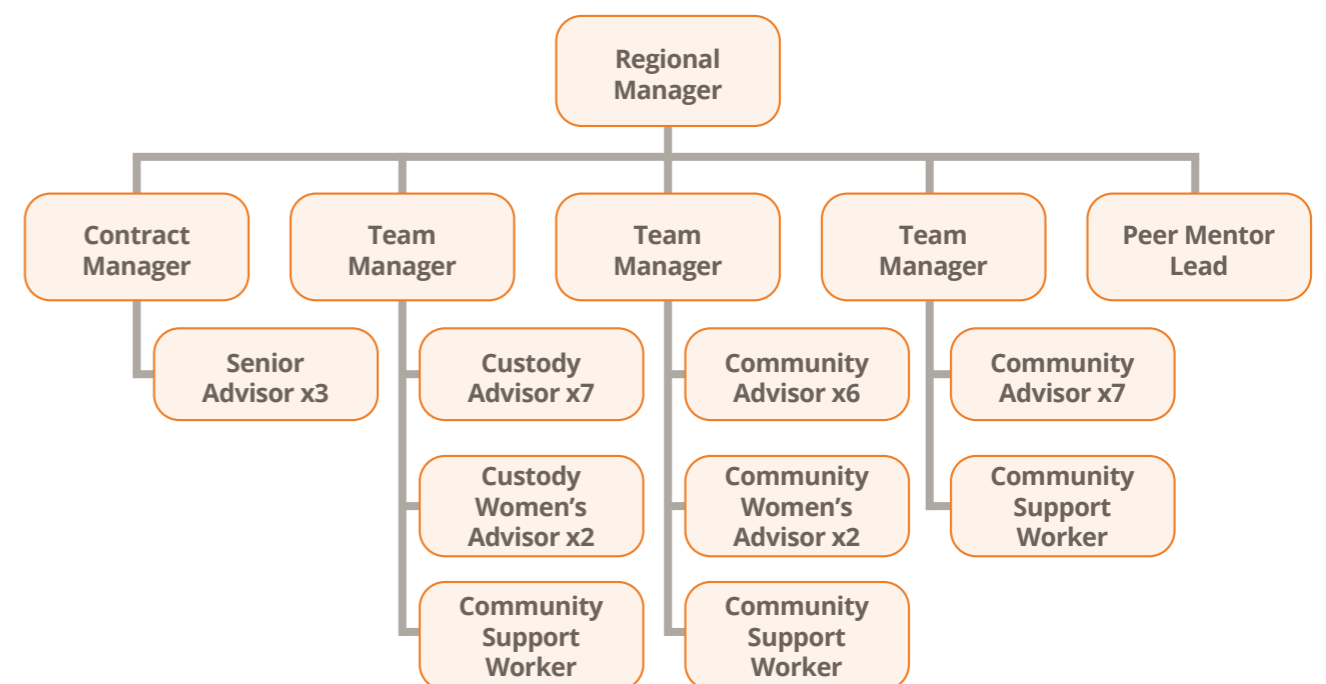
Staffing

The staffing team has continued to grow over the last three years, and the current team comprises 36.5 full time equivalent staff as shown on the organogram on the next page.

In addition to managers and senior advisors; staff are split into areas of operation:

- Seventeen community advisors (all of whom are co-located in probation offices across the ten boroughs which make up the Greater Manchester area).
- Ten custody advisors based in local prisons (HMPs Altcourse, Forest Bank, Hindley, Liverpool, Risley, Styal & Thorncross. The advisors also provide face-to-face work in HMPs Berwyn & Lancaster Farms owing to the high number of people released to Manchester in addition to providing a remote in-reach service to all prisons releasing Manchester residents).
- Four women’s advisors providing a gender-specific service to all women referrals (two based in custody and two in the community).
- Three community support workers providing holistic support to service users enabling them to access a range of practical and emotional support services.
- One peer mentor lead who is training and supporting people on probation to become peer mentors.

The Ingeus GMIRS Accommodation staff team



The service user journey

Every service user must be referred by their supervising probation practitioner. Once the referral is received, it goes through the Ingeus triage process which is designed to prioritise people at imminent risk of being homeless who are allocated an advisor immediately with other referrals allocated according to immediacy of need and appropriateness of service offering. A significant minority will either have resolved their housing situation (often staying with family members) or may already have been recalled to prison.

Following triage, service users are allocated an advisor who undertakes an initial assessment and discusses with them their housing options depending on their individual needs. These options mainly consist of:

- Registering as homeless with their local housing authority (LHA) – and advocating to be classified as in vulnerable need if appropriate.
- Accessing private rented accommodation which for a majority of the caseload who are aged under 35 years and single means in a house of multiple occupancy owing to benefit limits.
- Accessing supported housing for those with additional needs.
- Accessing emergency provision if in immediate need.

For those service users who are hard to place in any of these options owing to the nature of their offence (such as arson or child sex offences), Ingeus has contracted with a specialist consultant who will seek to place them.

The key tasks of the Ingeus advisors involve:

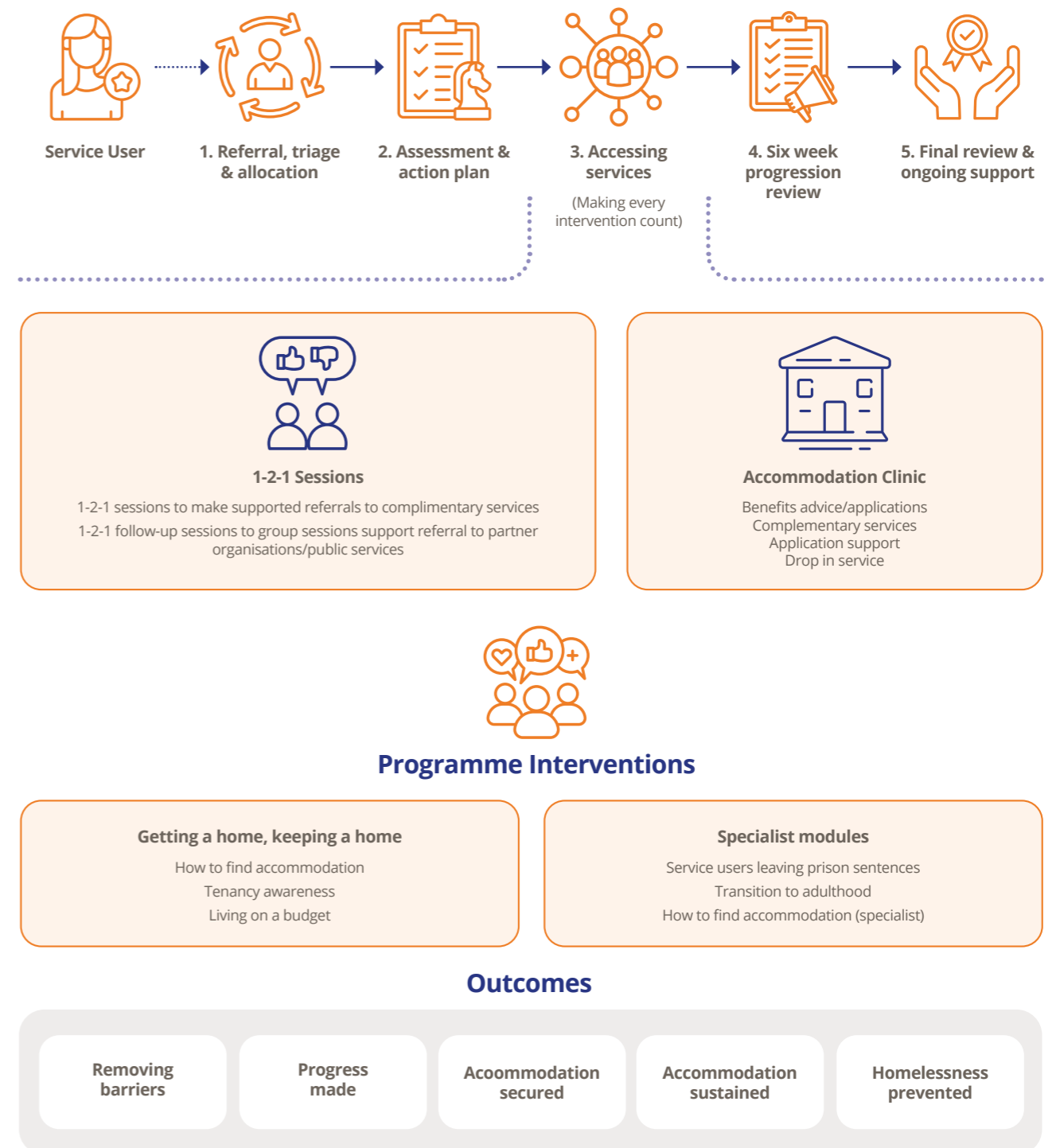
- Helping and advising service users on applying to appropriate housing providers.
- Building partnerships with a range of local providers.
- Information, advice, advocacy and support.
- Help accessing a range of key community services (this is the role of the community support workers who help people with everything from practical needs such as food banks, clothing, furniture through to support in accessing more emotional needs including mental health, substance misuse and other community-based services).

Custody based advisors also provide groupwork sessions to build service user trust, engage their full involvement in helping to resolve their housing issues on release and provide a range of advice and information on how to pursue different housing options.

A recent addition to the team has been the peer mentor lead who has just finished training the first cohort of peer mentors who will be able to provide additional support to service users.

All this work is discussed in substantially more detail in Chapter 3.

A summary of the service user journey is shown in the infographic below:



Chapter 2 Activities, outputs and outcomes

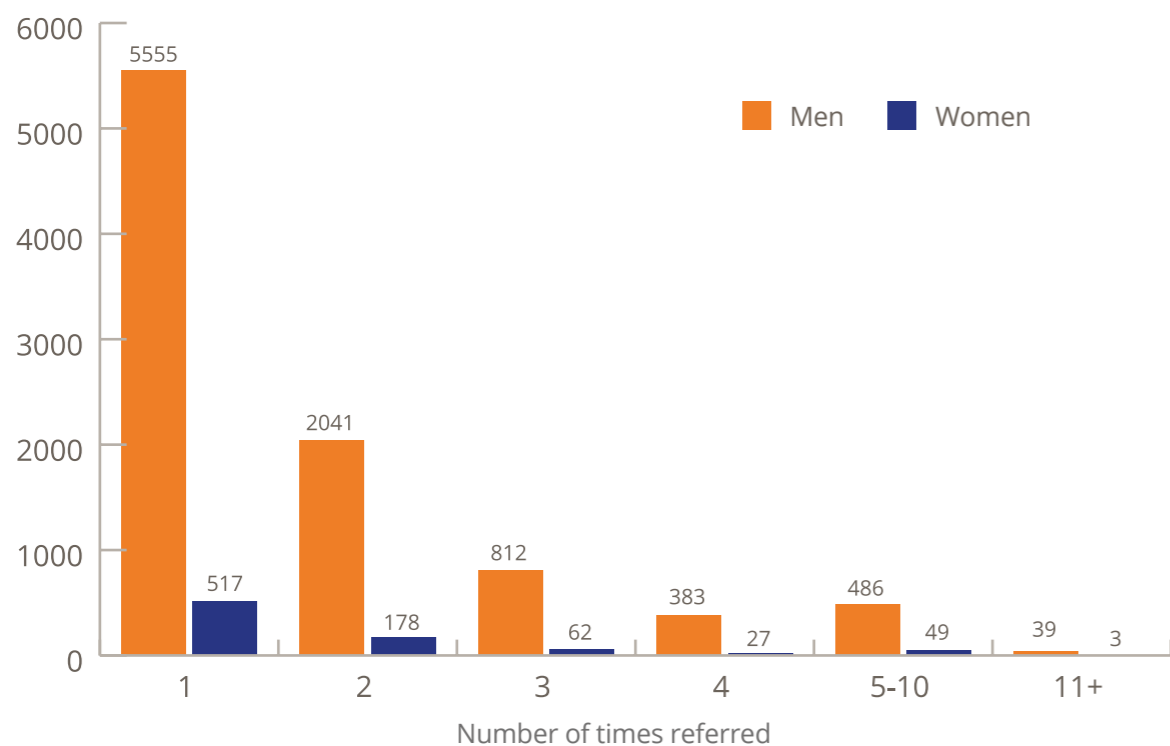
Overview

This chapter provides a demographic profile of the caseload before presenting the activities, outputs and outcomes of the project from its inception up to 31 March 2026.

Demographic profile

A total of 10,154 people were referred to the Accommodation Service between 1 November 2021 and 31 March 2026 with many people referred on repeated occasions. People in the criminal justice system and in need of housing advice and support are often caught in a revolving door of crime and complex needs. These 10,154 individuals have been referred to the service a total of 18,700 times. Both men and women were referred an average of 1.8 times. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of repeat referrals.

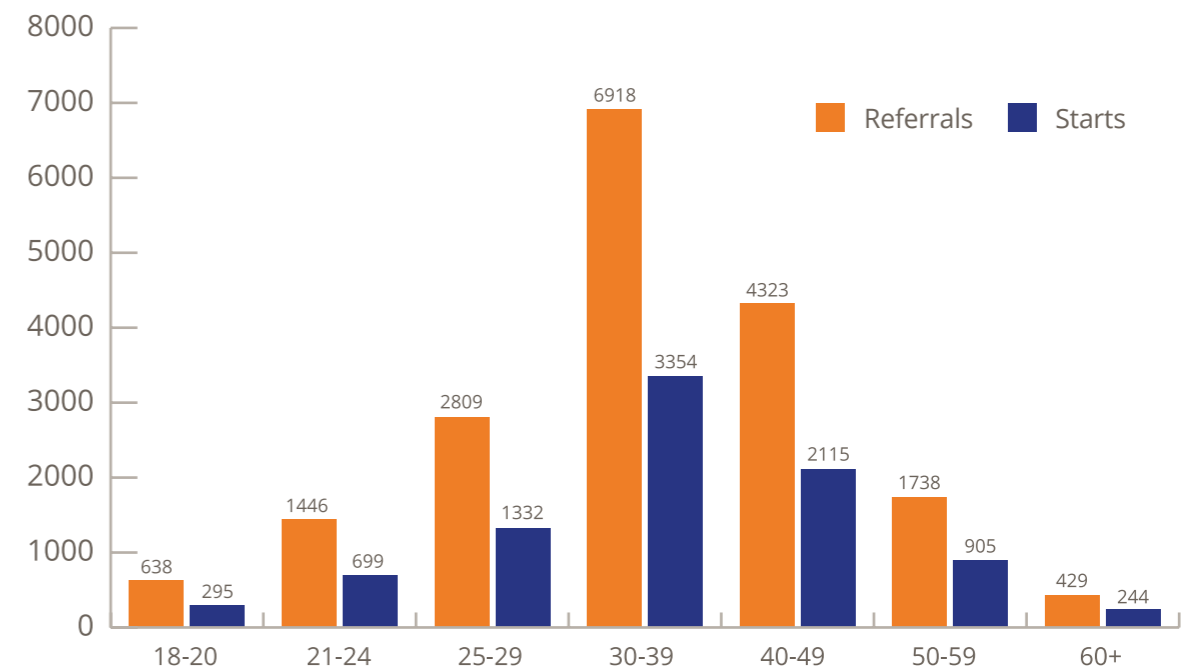
Figure One: Frequency of Referral to the Accommodation Service



Age

Demographic data is only available for the total number of 18,700 referrals (as opposed to the 10,154 individuals). Figure two below shows the age range both of all referrals and of those who “started”, that fully engaged with the service.

Figure Two: Age of Referrals and Starts (n = 18,302 referrals)



The Accommodation Service works with all age groups. Just over one quarter (4,893 = 26.7%) referrals were aged between 18 and 29 years old. Almost two fifths (6918 = 37.8%) were aged between 30-39 years old and almost another quarter (4,323 = 23.6%) were aged between 40-49 years old. The remaining 2,167 referrals (11.8%) were aged 50 years old or older. The rate of full engagement in the service is consistently just under half for those aged 18-49 years, increasing to more than half for those aged 50 years or older. Full details are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proportion of referrals “starting service” by age group

Age Range	Referrals	Starts	% Start Rate
18-20	638	295	46.3%
21-24	1446	699	48.3%
25-29	2809	1332	47.4%
30-39	3354	6918	48.5%
40-49	4323	2115	48.9%
50-59	905	1738	52.1%
60+	244	429	56.9%

Ethnicity

Figure Four: Ethnicity of Referrals and Starts (n = 18,536 referrals)

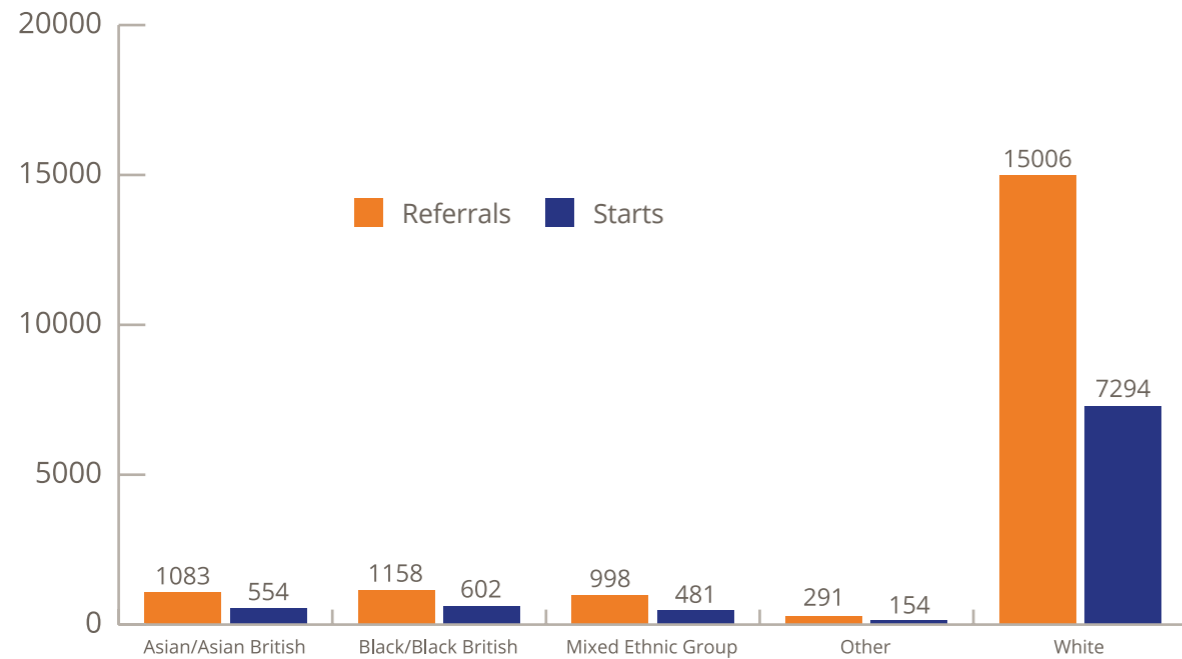


Figure four above shows that although Ingeus works with people from all ethnic backgrounds, over four fifths of referrals (15,006 = 81%) are from a white background. Engagement rates remain fairly constant irrespective of ethnic background with Black/Black British referrals most likely to engage fully with the service; full details are shown in Figure five below.

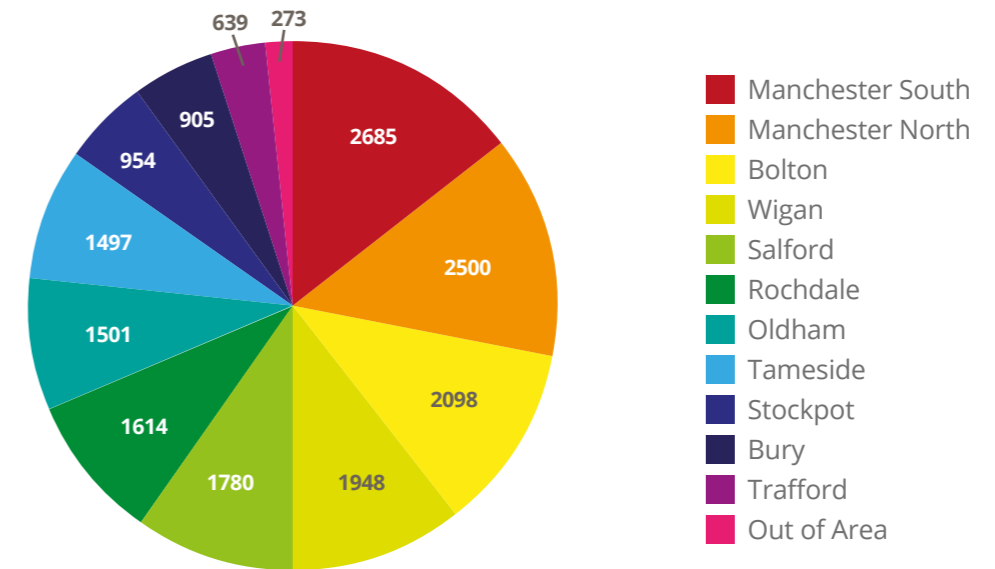
Figure 5: Proportion of referrals “starting service” by ethnic group

Age Range	Referrals	Starts	% Start Rate
Asian/Asian British	1083	554	51.2%
Black/Black British	1158	602	52%
Mixed Ethnic Group	998	481	48.2%
Other	291	154	51.7%
White	15006	7294	48.6%

Geography

The service records the Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) by which the person referred is supervised. These correspond to the local boroughs within GMCA with the exception that Manchester City is split into Manchester North and Manchester South. Figure 6 below shows the geography of all referrals .

Figure 6: Geographical location of referrals by PDU



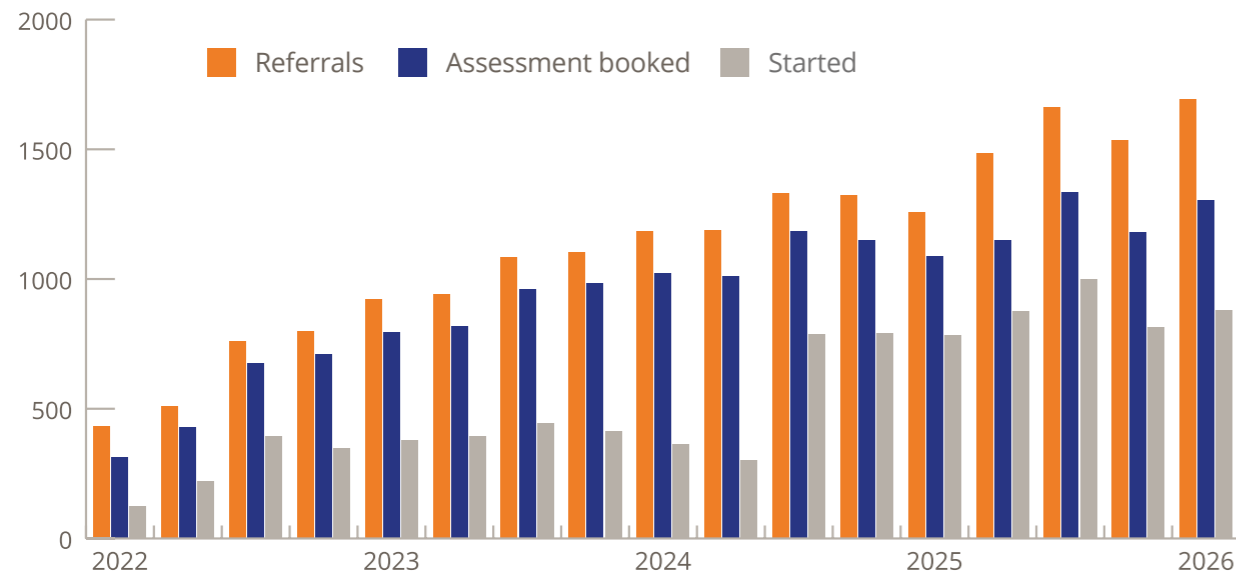
Referrals from Manchester make up more than one quarter (28.2%) of all referrals.

Activities

The service has become progressively busier and more successful over the four years since its launch. In the first quarter of 2022, 435 referrals were made to the service, after triage 313 people were found to need the service and had an assessment appointment booked and 124 started the service. A start is defined as someone both attending the initial assessment and then engaging with the advice and support provided. The corresponding figures for the first quarter of 2026 were 1695 referrals, 1303 assessments booked and 852 starts. This represents an almost fourfold increase in the number of referrals and an almost sevenfold increase in the number of starts. Figure 7 below shows the activity by quarter over the four-year period from January 2022 to March 2026.

Figure 7: Activity by quarter

Manchester Referrals and Starts March 2022-March 2026



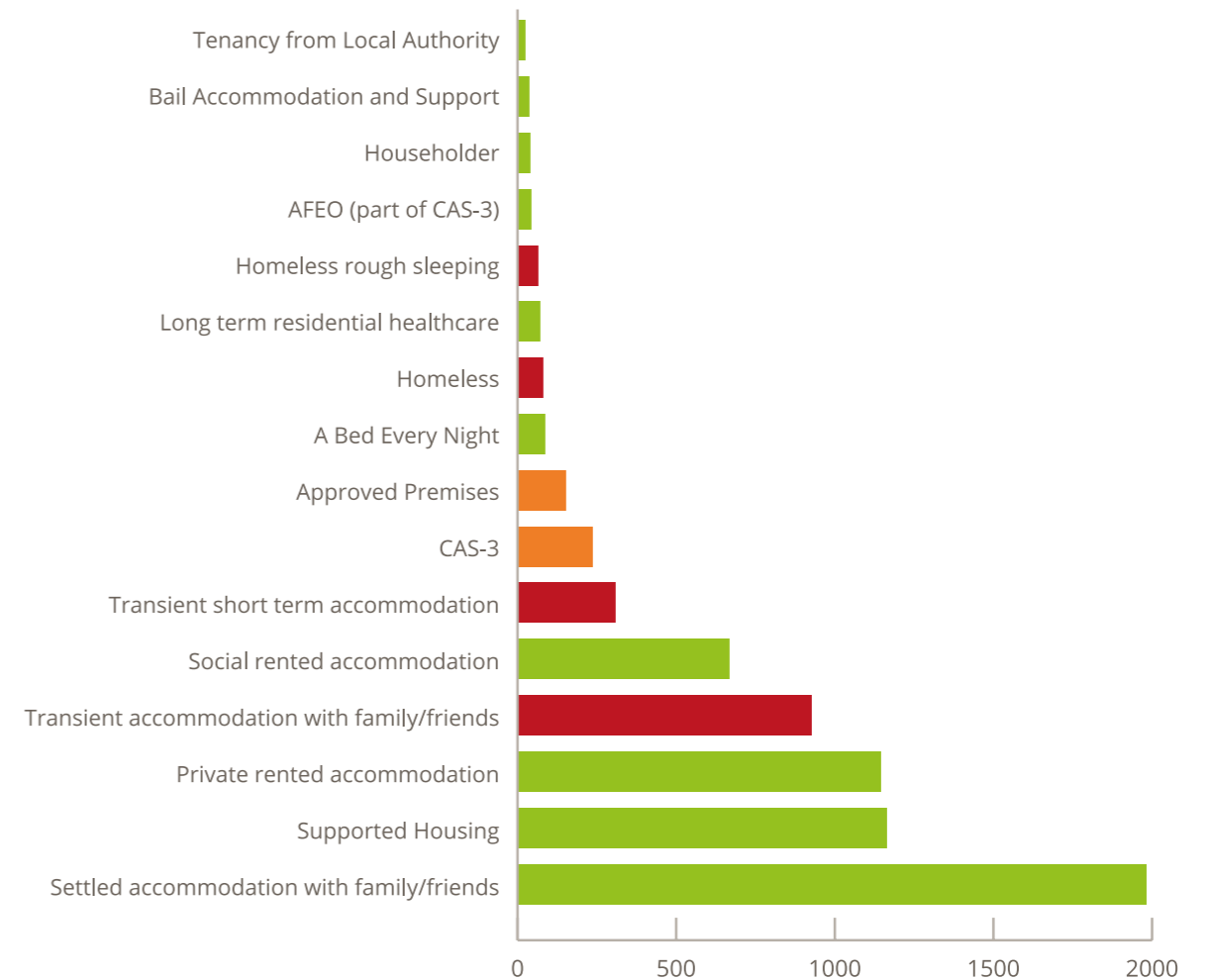
In the first quarter of 2022 almost two out of five (39.6%) people out of those who were triaged and found to need the service, engaged fully with the service. By the first quarter of 2026, this proportion had risen to more than two thirds (67.6%) of those in need of the service engaging with it.

Outcomes

In this section, I present the accommodation outcomes of all cases which have been closed; this is a total of 12,745 cases although the outcome is unknown in 373, making a total of 12,372 available outcomes. Figure 8 below presents the accommodation outcomes in cases. This represents all cases where the outcome is known and is within the potential control of Ingeus. The chart does not include the following outcome categories: people who have returned to custody at case closure (2683 individuals); people subject to immigration detention or other immigration restrictions (62); people recalled or terminated on the first day of their release (219); cases withdrawn before information and advice was provided (2315); and people who have, sadly, died (12). Therefore Figure 8 presents outcomes for 7,020 referrals which are organised into three categories: permanent housing, temporary secure housing and insecure housing/homeless. The chart uses a simple traffic light system; showing permanent housing in green, temporary secure housing in amber and insecure/homeless outcomes in red.

Using this classification, the service has achieved positive outcomes in more than four fifths of cases (5,643 out of 7,020 = 80.4%); with 5254 (74.8%) service users finding permanent accommodation and 389 (5.5%) finding temporary secure accommodation.

Figure 8 Accommodation outcomes (n = 7,020)



We now turn to Chapter 3 which provides the views of staff, stakeholders and service users and provides a more detailed account of the service delivered.

Chapter 3: The views of staff, stakeholders & service users

Introduction

The findings in this chapter are based on interviews with 26 Accommodation service staff members, three partners and a range of service users who provided feedback via video testimonies, written letters and telephone interviews. The chapter starts with a short overall description of the Accommodation Service before focusing on the different aspects of service delivery, these are: information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided in custody; IAG in the community; women specific IAG services; holistic community support and peer mentoring.

Overview

There is a consensus among all parties, stakeholders (including the HMPPS Contract Manager) and staff that the service has always been characterised by very high levels of demand as evidenced by the data presented in the previous chapter. At times, the service has struggled to meet this level of demand, especially where increased workload has resulted in higher than usual staff turnover and sickness rates. The commissioners have recognised this by investing in more staff across the life of the contract with three new posts currently being created to tackle specific features of this high demand (discussed later in this chapter).

Nevertheless, the service has been successful in providing support to over 10,000 individuals, helping over 5,600 of them to find housing. The HMPPS Performance, Assurance and Risk Group recently stated that Ingeus GMIRS Accommodation services in Greater Manchester and the South Central Probation region are the top two performing services providing housing advice to people on probation and in prison across the country. We now look at the service delivered in more detail.

The custody service

A team of custody advisors works in all local prisons and neighbouring prisons which release substantial numbers of Greater Manchester residents. People in prison in need of housing IAG are referred to the team by either their community probation practitioner or the prison pre-release team. Ingeus Housing advisors see everyone who is referred to the prison wing or unit and explain the range of possible housing options available on release. Typical components of the work include:

- Organising housing assessments with local authority housing teams. Advisors have successfully negotiated with housing teams that assessments can be undertaken either by video interview (enabling advisors to support and advocate for service users) or by a telephone call directly to a prison cell. In the latter situation, advisors have successfully negotiated with prisons that the housing team number is added to the permitted list of callers for an individual and that the cost of the call does not come out of their (very limited) personal funds.
- Referrals to a range of supported housing providers.
- Negotiate with probation staff to refer to CAS3 accommodation (a government initiative which provides up to 84 nights (12 weeks) of temporary accommodation and basic support for prison leavers who are at risk of homelessness).
- Referrals to emergency access accommodation to ensure that people released from prison have at least short-term housing.
- Tenancy preservation work. Where individuals had a tenancy prior to reception in prison, advisors liaise and advocate with the landlord to inform them that the tenant is in prison and negotiates for the affordable repayment of any rent arrears to ensure that an individual can return to their home on release.

In addition to this individually based IAG work, several custody advisors provide groupwork interventions. These groupwork interventions are designed to provide people in prison with information around their housing rights and options but also to encourage them to plan for their release. Advisors are explicitly given licence by Ingeus senior managers to be creative in their delivery of these interventions to encourage people in prison to engage with the challenge of finding accommodation and invest time and energy in working with the service to maximise their chances of finding housing on release. For example, the custody advisor based at HMP Forest Bank uses her theatre and community work background to deliver dynamic and interactive groups which aim to:

- Make the housing application processes easier to comprehend and complete.
- Motivate people in prison to be fully engaged in seeking housing (many people have had very negative previous experiences and may have lost tenancies or been classified by local authorities as “intentionally homeless”).
- Develop small communities of mutual support.
- Build trust and hope.

In interview, the custody advisor recounted how initial group sessions were met with resistance and mistrust but that, over time, the groups had become so successful that they were no longer advertised with people in prison recommending the sessions to their peers and encouraging them to participate. Ingeus has received a number of letters from people in prison saying how grateful they were for the help and support of the advisors.

In a series of individual and group interviews, custody advisors discussed what had been the key components of effective practice that they had developed.

- Administrative efficiency and unrelenting commitment. Caseloads are high with new referrals every day, advisors spoke of the importance of keeping on top of the workload to ensure that everyone is seen promptly and as far ahead of their release date as possible to maximise the chances of finding accommodation in the community.
- Investing time in building close working relationships with prison staff and the providers of other helping services such as benefits and debt advice, employability and substance misuse and mental health support services. In several of the more modern prisons, staff were based in the same space as these other professionals and had found it much easier to build collaborative working arrangements which enabled a co-ordinated approach and overcame one of the most obdurate criminal justice system barriers of being able to access timely information around release dates (particularly prone to change with the introduction of the Government's SD40 early release scheme) and risk assessments. Many advisors had developed strong relationships with staff in other departments which effectively meant they were able to reduce administrative delays by talking directly to them to gain key information and plan joint interventions.
- Willingness to provide an individual approach depending on service users' needs. This often required flexibility, advocacy and an ability to solve the range of problems that beset both housing and prison administrative systems.

An ongoing challenge for custody advisors is the fact that a substantial part of their caseload comprises the same group of individuals, typically with complex needs relating to addiction, mental health and neurodiversity, who are caught in a revolving door of low-level crime, release and prison recall. This issue has been recognised by commissioners who are funding an additional advisor post with a specific remit to work with this client group.

Case Studies

To illustrate the work of custody-based advisors, we include two case studies which demonstrate the complexity of many cases and the high level of commitment and persistence frequently required by staff to achieve a positive outcome.

David – the importance of a bespoke approach

David was referred to the service whilst in custody at HMP Altcourse because he was at risk of being released homeless; it was uncertain whether his proposed release address would be approved by the probation service.

At initial assessment, it became clear that David had multiple needs including: long term mental health problems including depression and anxiety; difficulty in understanding information owing to his dyslexia and neurodivergence and a high level of anxiety about being released homeless.

The advisor and David co-produced a clear action plan including a Duty to Refer to the local housing authority (LHA) and exploring potential supported housing provided that this was not shared accommodation.

Achieving this outcome required a substantial investment in time and effort from the advisor which was built on a partnership approach. Work included:

- Liaising with the LHA to arrange a housing assessment. This required repeated attempts and the worker's insistence on a video-based assessment, ensuring that David had a full understanding of the process and outcome.
- Following the assessment, the LHA identified a self-contained private rented property which met David's needs, particularly his requirement for non-shared facilities.
- Following further advocacy work, the LHA agreed to fund the rent deposit and bond, removing a significant financial barrier to securing the tenancy.
- Throughout the ten weeks of this process the advisor constantly reassured David to reduce his anxiety throughout numerous delays in the process, including sharing photos and details of the property and a detailed calculation of the costs to allay his concerns around being able to afford his new housing.
- The tenancy was not available until the day after David's release; therefore, the advisor used Ingeus funds to pay for a one-night hotel stay to bridge this gap.

Following this work, David moved successfully moved into his own tenancy.

Mark – the importance of advocacy

Mark was on remand at HMP Forest Bank when he was referred to the Accommodation Service. He had a trial date 8 weeks after the referral date when it was possible that he would be released directly from court when he would return to the community where he would be homeless. Following his initial assessment, it was clear that Mark could be a Priority Need with his LHA since he was undergoing procedures for a Cancer diagnosis. He had also been homeless for a long time. The advisor and Mark agreed to make referrals both to the LHA and supported accommodation.

This was an extensive piece of work involving liaison with a range of housing providers, healthcare services and the Court. Mark was assessed by the LHA but was not accepted to be in priority need. Mark's court case underwent multiple delays, and he remained stuck on remand for several months. Therefore, the advisor embarked on a process of liaising with Mark's solicitor and the Bail Officer at the prison and eventually secured a CAS-2 placement where Mark could be safely housed while waiting for his court date.

This type of work is increasingly important as there were 16,025 remand prisoners on 31 March 2026, 18.3% of the prison population. The Chief Inspector of Prisons specifically raised the plight of this group in a key findings paper published this March, saying that despite being almost one fifth of the prison population, they have much poorer access to all services including resettlement. The accommodation advice and support service provided to people on remand is acknowledged by the prisons and a range of partner agencies including the Department for Work and Pensions who commented on how well the two services work and highlighted the very rapid response by the accommodation service to individuals highlighted by DWP as being in need.

The Community Based Service

Community advisors are co-located with probation teams in their offices, and their role is very similar to their custody-based colleagues. However, there are some different challenges and advantages. A key challenge is that it can be harder to get up-to-date information about the location and current situation of someone who is referred to the service. Advisors cannot access probation information systems, and it is harder to circumvent this problem without a central point of contact like a prison resettlement unit. For this reason, Ingeus has adapted the system to introduce a triage process immediately following referral which is designed to provide advisors with up-to-date accurate information about an individual's whereabouts and current housing needs. The triage system can identify large numbers of referrals who have either been recalled to custody or are not in need of accommodation. A total of 2,630 referrals (14% of the total caseload) since the service began operating have not had an initial assessment booked because they were found to not be in need of the service. Although the current triage system has greatly reduced the inefficiencies associated with repeated attempts to contact a person who is not in current need, it still struggles to cope with the volume of referrals. For this reason, one of the three additional worker posts in the process of being created by the contract manager will be added to the small triage team.

Conversely, an advantage for the community team is that, over a period, they can forge close working relationships with probation staff and key individuals working in a range of housing provision. A number of probation staff have commented on how invaluable they find the accommodation service and how committed and willing Ingeus staff are to put themselves out to help people on probation find safe housing. The close links with housing providers has resulted in some of these providers being prepared to expedite their own processes and procedures when service users are in immediate and unexpected need. This is a common occurrence, with accommodation which has been organised in advance often not available at the last moment for a range of reasons including: changes in release dates; new risk assessments or family disagreements.

In interview, community advisors shared several critical success factors that they had learnt from experience in their role:

- An ability to work under the pressure of high caseloads.
- Investment of time and energy in building working relationships with the probation staff in their PDU and officers within the LHA.
- A similar investment of time and energy in finding the widest possible range of accommodation resources within their local authority. The third new post currently being created by the contract manager will be dedicated to finding more housing options across GMCA.
- The importance of using the range of community resources accessed by the service's Community Support Workers (discussed in detail later in this Chapter).
- High levels of commitment, perseverance and problem-solving abilities including a willingness to advocate for service users and contest their eligibility for different accommodation options.

Community advisors also have access to another specialist service, Rennsolutions, commissioned by Ingeus from the contract funds which involves the contracting of a specialised service to find accommodation for service users convicted of sexual or arson offences who are typically excluded from the eligibility criteria for most forms of housing provision. This is a vital resource, since sex offenders are a substantial and growing component of the probation caseload. Between 1 October 2023 and 31 May 2026, this service succeeded in finding accommodation for 372 of the 858 (43.4%) individuals referred by the GMIRS Accommodation Service; an extremely high percentage for this difficult-to-place group.

Although we have described the custody and community advisors separately in this report, very many people on probation go between the two and a co-ordinated service is essential. Indeed, one service user, interviewed for this report, talked about how well the custody and community teams worked together to support him:

“They help me get CAS-3 housing and then helped me move onto other services. It’s not just been housing, but everything. They’ve helped me with work and volunteering. It was so much better than I had expected, they are still supporting me today.”

Case studies

Again, the most effective way of illustrating the work of the community team is by sharing two case studies.

Everton – Tenancy preservation

When Everton was first referred to the service he was facing court proceedings for eviction in nine days’ time. He was also struggling with ADHD and a host of personal problems. The advisor prioritised Everton’s case and succeeded in convincing the Judge to grant a six-week adjournment and managed to negotiate an affordable repayment schedule. This required prolonged advocacy in which an initial agreement with the landlord of £225 per week towards arrears was re-negotiated to include a much more realistic arrangement consisting of full payment of current rent (covered by his housing allowance) and £20 per week towards arrears.

The advisor also represented Everton to lobby for a range of essential repairs (including a front door that did not close securely and a broken shower) which have been sent to the letting agent and the Private Sector Housing Standards enforcement system.

Everton remains in touch with his advisor, has been paying his arrears regularly and is delighted to have kept his home.

Tony – from homelessness to tenancy

Tony was referred to the service when he became homeless. His situation was particularly challenging owing to a restraining order linked to his previous address and the closure of his case with the LHA. Shortly after his referral, Tony’s situation worsened when he lost his job; he was also struggling with anxiety and vulnerability linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Tony received an intensive and wide-reaching series of interventions from his advisor including a referral to the Rough Sleeping Team, facilitating re-engagement with statutory services and sustained advocacy with the LHA which resulted in reinstatement of his case and Tony being placed into Band 2 priority, significantly improving his housing prospects.

Eventually Tony was offered and accepted a property through the LHA.

When Tony moved in, he had no possessions or a mobile phone, essential for keeping in touch with support agencies. One of the Community Support Workers organised both a phone and basic furniture and bedding as well as connecting Tony with his local food bank and other community support charities.

Tony provided the following feedback to his advisor:

“I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting me throughout this journey and for being so proactive. My circumstances have finally started to improve, and I feel like I can begin making a fresh start. I genuinely appreciate the support and kindness you have shown throughout this process.”

Women's Service

Although women make up a relatively small proportion of the probation caseload (9.2% on 31 December 2025), they tend to have more complex needs, and the Ingeus Accommodation Service takes a gendered approach and has four women specific advisors based in both the community and prison. The women's advisors in the community work out of probation offices and attend the 12 women's centres across Greater Manchester. They can form close working relationships with probation staff who are "female concentrators", a term to describe probation staff who hold mainly female caseloads.

The women's team works in a gender-specific, trauma-informed way and has smaller caseloads than their colleagues owing to the complexity of cases which include large numbers of women who are victims/ survivors of domestic abuse who require specialist housing provision. Trauma-informed work also requires more face-to-face, often longer sessions since it is inappropriate to rush women through their disclosure of abuse or other trauma. One service user interviewed for this report described how her worker spent a whole day with her when she became homeless because of fleeing domestic abuse. The worker has found her both emergency and interim accommodation and continues to support her to find a permanent, safe solution.

"She keeps in touch constantly and has been with me every step of the way. She really listens to me; she's not just ticking boxes but really cares about the people she works with."

This "team-within-a-team" have succeeded in identifying a wide range of women-specific (or women-appropriate housing provision) across Greater Manchester; since many women will need to find housing outside their local authority for reasons of safety, this is particularly important.

The women's workers seek to provide a holistic service, often helping service users register with GPs and engage in multi-agency liaison work with police, social services and other agencies.

Case studies

Again, case study examples of work undertaken help to illuminate the approach.

Helen – intensive support to achieve tenancy

Helen was referred to the service because she was struggling to find housing. She is a care leaver with a range of personal challenges including foetal alcohol syndrome, ADHD, and difficulties with comprehension and literacy. At the time of referral, she was in an unsafe, exploitative living situation with her mother. Despite being an automatic priority need, her housing application had stalled after the council asked her to complete an extensive tenancy skills booklet that she was not able to do.

Her advisor established a coordinated, multi-agency approach, involving probation, leaving care services, adult social care and housing and succeeded in negotiating "reasonable adjustments" with senior housing managers, allowing Helen to complete the Ingeus Accommodation Workbook as an alternative to the tenancy skills one.

Her advisor provided Helen with tailored, pace appropriate support, breaking the workbook down into manageable sections, reading questions aloud and recording Helen's responses while ensuring she fully understood and participated throughout. This approach built Helen's confidence, reduced her anxiety, and enabled her to demonstrate her tenancy readiness.

As a direct result, Helen was approved by the housing panel and offered a first floor flat in a social housing project. At her final session, she proudly confirmed she had moved into her new home, had begun settling in, and was enjoying making it her own. She expressed feeling happy, safe, and stable for the first time in a long while.

Rachael – moving on from domestic abuse

Rachael was referred to the service due to concerns related to domestic abuse while living with her ex-partner. She had ongoing physical and mental health needs in addition to being in treatment for drug dependence. Rachael was clear that she wanted female-only accommodation out of her local area to feel safe.

Together Rachael and her advisor agreed to complete a Duty to Refer application to the LHA and a referral to Pro Socia, a supported accommodation provider operating across Greater Manchester. Appointments were arranged at the women's hub for Rachael to feel safe and engage in a range of other support.

Rachael disclosed a serious escalation in domestic abuse, explaining she had been physically restrained by her ex-partner and prevented from leaving the property. Her caseworker offered immediate safeguarding support, including contact with the police, domestic abuse services, and refuges; however, she declined refuge provision due to previous negative experiences.

Therefore, the caseworker made immediate and direct contact with Pro Socia to secure a placement. A supported accommodation offer was confirmed, with a move in date scheduled following a forthcoming bank holiday. As Rachael had no safe place to stay in the interim, her caseworker negotiated emergency hotel accommodation as well as providing her with a new mobile phone, toiletries, clothing from the clothes bank, food, a bus pass and written details of key contacts, including Ingeus, probation, Pro Socia, and the women's centre

Rachael moved into the hotel and subsequently into her own supported accommodation five days later.

Community Support Service

As several of these case studies make clear, many service users have a range of interconnected challenges which mean that they often require help not just to find sustainable accommodation but to maintain it.

For this reason, Ingeus has funded three community support workers who provide some of this holistic support for its service users. Between them they have developed a huge portfolio of community agencies who can support service users including (but not restricted to):

- Food banks.
- Charities which can provide clothing, including those suitable for attending a job interview.
- Charities which can provide furniture and bedding for those moving into unfurnished accommodation (these charities are supplemented a dedicated funding pot which provides basic starter kits including kettle, pots & pans, crockery and cutlery and mobile phones to be able to keep in touch with probation and support services).

The community support workers also provide individual advocacy and support to help vulnerable service users engage with helping services and/or key statutory services such as housing and employment.

They have developed specialist knowledge in advocating for service users who are asylum seekers. If individuals are granted the right to stay, they take them to the only regional job centre (Preston) which can issue a National Insurance number so that they can claim benefits and search for work.

They also prioritise work with particularly vulnerable service users such as people with mental health problems and those in need of emergency accommodation.

Like their advisor colleagues, the community support workers put considerable emphasis on equipping service users with the knowledge and skills to meet their own needs. They run regular groupwork information and skills workshops at a range of local venues including probation hostels (known as Approved Premises) and wellbeing hubs.

Peer mentoring service

Ingeus has a strong track record of valuing lived experience; having trained hundreds of peer mentors across its different projects over the last decade. The organisation has also employed more than 100 individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Their Justice division senior management team was committed to including a peer mentoring offer within the service and succeeded in securing funding for a part-time peer mentor lead starting in late 2025. The lead finished training the first cohort of four peer mentors (all currently supervised by the probation service) in April 2026 and these individuals will be supporting a range of service users. There has been overwhelmingly positive feedback about the mentoring programme from both probation staff and its first four graduates.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and considerations for the future

The GMCA context

In developing the GMIRS Accommodation Service, Ingeus has been able to draw on the experiences of the wider Ingeus organisation and its history of working in Greater Manchester over the last 12 years. GMCA has been recognised by government as a region with a history of strategic planning with a multi-agency approach which makes it a good test site for new initiatives looking to tackle intransigent social problems in a joined-up way. These include justice, employment and substance use initiatives all of which are of the highest priority for people in contact with the criminal justice system.

In designing the service in Greater Manchester, Ingeus has sought to align the service with key regional strategic priorities including:

- A place-based, local service with workers co-located with local probation teams and women's centres, looking for local solutions within service users' own localities where family and community connections give them the best chance of moving away from a criminal lifestyle and meeting their personal goals.
- An emphasis on partnership working with both statutory and VCSE organisations. Ingeus staff have built lasting, reciprocal working relationships with a wide range of bodies both in the accommodation and in the wider sectors, particularly around key domains of support including employment, finance and debt, and health – particularly mental health and substance use. Groupwork advice and support sessions are not just provided on probation and prison premises but also at Wellbeing hubs in all council areas.
- A belief in social value, with staff closely involved with grassroots local charities and delivering additional services outside the contract parameters including engaging with street soccer schemes where participants are also given free food.

Conclusion

This is an extremely busy service; accommodation is the core element in any package of support aiming to help people on probation desist from a criminal lifestyle and achieve their potential in life. The reality is that, nationally as well as within GMCA, housing need significantly outstrips demand; this is particularly true for young men under the age of 35 (the majority of the probation caseload) and doubly true for people with experience of the criminal justice system who are regarded as undeserving and face stigma from service providers as well as many people in their local communities.

The fact that the service has helped over 5,600 individuals find accommodation given these pressures is to be commended.

The case studies presented in this report demonstrate the extent to which Ingeus staff routinely need to demonstrate very high levels of commitment and persistence and develop robust and meaningful partnerships with a wide range of agencies to achieve just one positive outcome in most cases.

Considerations for the future

Despite the very high and increasing demands on the service, Ingeus has worked closely with GMCA and the probation region to ensure sufficient staffing levels to deliver a high quality and effective service, when all posts are full. The combination of staff progressing their careers and delays in the official vetting process have at times meant that the service has carried several vacancies which has required a flexible and resilient approach.

The outcomes achieved demonstrate the value of commissioners and providers working in partnership, a state of affairs appreciated by the Ingeus team. In addition, the holistic approach taken by Ingeus to this accommodation service has contributed to better outcomes and bodes well for the future holistic approach to commissioning.



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